

Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Population Delisting Process – Conservation Strategy Development

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- Grizzly bear population in the lower 48 states listed as threatened in 1975.
- Land management agencies in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) adopted Guidelines for Management Involving Grizzly Bears in the GYA in 1979.
- Original Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan published in 1982 outlining a monitoring scheme that employed three demographic sub-goals to measure and monitor recovery of the Yellowstone grizzly bear population.
- Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) formed in 1983 to coordinate management and research actions for grizzly bear recovery.
- The Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee (YES), a subcommittee of the IGBC, was formed in 1983 to coordinate grizzly bear recovery efforts specific to the GYA.
- Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines (modified version of initial land management agency guidelines) adopted in 1986.
- Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan revised and updated in 1993 to include the requirement for documenting the habitat necessary to support a recovered population.
- In 1994, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) proposed to delist the Yellowstone grizzly bear population.
- The 3 demographic recovery criteria for delisting had been attained. However, habitat standards were still needed to assure habitats within the primary conservation area are capable of sustaining the grizzly bear population over time.
- Yellowstone Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Subcommittee (YES) began developing a conservation strategy (CS) and habitat standards required by the grizzly bear recovery plan (RP).
- YES completed the Draft Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear in the Greater Yellowstone Area in early 2000.
- The draft CS was reviewed and revised by all member agencies of YES, including the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) Wildlife Division.
- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) released the CS for public comment in the spring of 2000 with open houses held in Cody, Jackson and cities in Idaho and Montana. The CS was also available at public libraries.
- The Governors of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming formed a citizen roundtable in the spring of 2000 to review and make recommendations for final draft.
- Public review and Governors' roundtable identified 20 major issues that YES determined needed further work to improve the document and assure that all delisting issues were adequately addressed. The roundtable also made several recommendations for the development of the final CS, state management plan, research, citizen involvement, etc. The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (WGFC) also provided specific comments on issues with the CS.

- March 2001 three new commissioners were appointed to the WGFC.
- Research on the technical issues that needed to be addressed was presented at the 2001 International Bear Association conference and published in peer reviewed scientific journals.
- The WGFC directed WGFD Director John Baughman to meet with Ralph Morgenweck, USFWS Region 6 Director, to find a way to speed up completion of the CS. Chris Smith, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department, suggested that Montana, Wyoming and Idaho take the lead in finalizing the CS. Director Baughman seized the opportunity and promoted the three state efforts to complete the CS as quickly as possible.
- The state led effort to complete the CS was approved by IGBC in July of 2001.
- Facilitated state-led process began February 2002 resulting in a draft final CS mid-October 2002.
- Draft CS sent to YES in October for review; it was approved with minor changes by YES at November 2002 meeting.
- The WGFC, at their request, was briefed on the CS development process and current status at October 2002 meeting in Jackson. No discussion of CS content took place, nor was an anticipated date or place of signing the CS noted in the minutes of the October meeting. CS wasn't available at this time since it had not been reviewed by YES or the IGBC.
- YES forwarded the document to IGBC in mid-November 2002 for the IGBC's December 2002 meeting.
- IGBC approved the document at its December meeting, and provided all IGBC members time to review and recommend language clarification changes. At the request of the Commission the WGFD forwarded a copy of the 11/02 draft (yellow cover) to the WGFC for review.
- The WGFD did not place the CS on the Commission agenda at the December 2002, January, February or March 2003 meetings.
- WGFD personnel reviewed 11/02 draft and requested a change in language from "may" to "will" to clarify the statement "when population and distribution goals are met mortality standards in the CS will be (instead of may be) reviewed and revised as necessary to allow state agencies to manage for stable bear numbers.
- The USFWS sent a copy of the CS final draft in mid-March 2003 to the WGFD, which was reviewed for the requested word change. Not only was the requested word change made but additional language was also added to the MOU signature page that stated: "All signatories recognize that each has statutory responsibilities that cannot be delegated and that this agreement does not and is not considered to abrogate any of their statutory responsibilities. This agreement is subject to and is intended to be consistent with all appropriate federal and state laws. Funding of this MOU is subject to approval and appropriations by approved state and federal entities."
- March 2003 two new commissioners were appointed to the WGFC.
- Although the WGFD solicited no comments from the WGFC on the 11/02 draft, it was decided, after a briefing and discussions with WGFD Director Manning in mid March, that the changes in the final draft of the CS should be reviewed with the WGFC prior to the signing at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. John Emmerich brought this issue to the Commission in the March 17th Commission meeting

with an update on the changes provided. The item was not on the March agenda, nor added to the agenda at the beginning of the meeting.

- Following discussions at the meeting about agenda procedural issues and need for further discussion, it was decided to provide the two new Commissioners with the 11/02 CS draft and provide all the Commissioners with a summary of the changes incorporated into the final draft. An open session WGFC conference call meeting was scheduled for March 24, 2003 to discuss the final draft of the CS and to determine if Director Manning would be authorized to sign the CS at the North American Wildlife Conference on March 26, 2003.
- Commissioner Fleming moved and Commissioner Lovercheck seconded, that the Commission should approve authority for the Director to move forward to sign the Conservation Strategy, with edits, and allow the Director to negotiate on behalf of Wyoming in this Conservation Strategy. The WGFC voted 6 to 1 to pass the motion. At the direction of the commission president no public comment was made.
- Completion of the CS is a significant step in the overall delisting process that triggers initiation of the final delisting steps, U.S. Forest and National Park Plan amendments to incorporate habitat standards and completion of the distinct population segment analysis. The CS does not take effect until formal delisting of the Yellowstone grizzly bear occurs. In addition the CS will be reviewed and updated every five years or whenever new data necessitates a change. Any revisions will be open to full public review. The CS will be available for viewing at www.fs.fed.us/r1/wildlife/igbc
- Wyoming Game & Fish Director Brent Manning signed the Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy on March 26, 2003, at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. As a result of the signing, the USFS announced they would promptly address the grizzly bear habitat issue through a single amendment to all appropriate forest plans. In addition, the USFWS advised they would start the distinct population segment analysis. Also the National Park Service announced they would move forward with revising park management plans so they can implement their provisions of the grizzly bear CS.
- USFS initiated their process to amend the six National Forests within the GYA to incorporate the grizzly bear habitat standards contained in the CS with a ROD expected in 2006 to coincide with release of the final grizzly bear delisting rule.
- Distinct Population Segment Analysis and draft delisting rule prepared by the USFWS for internal review in July 2005.
- Draft Delisting Rule published in the Federal Register by the USFWS November 15, 2005, with a 90-day comments period.